

CONNECTICUT POST

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Bells toll for victims

Newtown tragedy:
Mourning continues as
NRA breaks its silence

By Michael P. Mayko

NEWTOWN — Bells tolled and the heavens wept Friday morning as thousands gathered to mark the one-week anniversary of the killing of 20 first-graders and six staffers at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

They tolled 26 times in Bridgeport, Hartford and each of the state's 169 municipalities at 9:30 a.m.

That was the time the gunman, Adam Lanza, 20, blasted his way into the school on what had been a peaceful Friday morning.

"When I heard the 26 bells ring it just melted my soul," said a devastated Kerrie Glassman, of Sandy Hook, who knew seven victims. "It's just overwhelming."

They tolled in Massachusetts, Georgia, South Carolina and across the nation, as millions of Americans wept along with the grieving residents of this shattered but resolute town.

"We need unity as a nation to stand against this violence," said the Rev. Bill Coates, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Gainesville, Ga. "It allows those who feel helpless to help those whose lives were affected."

They tolled in Washington, where advocates for stricter gun and ammunition control hoped the emotion would fire an effort to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and provide more federal dollars for school security and help for the mentally ill.

"We should make sure the bells never leave our head," said Chris Murphy, the state's newly elected U.S. senator. "We need to hear them when we wake up, for as long as it takes ... that we do what we have to do to live up to the beautiful memories of these people who died."

On Friday, National Rifle Association spokesman Wayne LaPierre had a different solution to the issue of gun violence in schools — more guns in schools.

He urged Congress to fund armed guards in every school under a National School Shield Program using a volunteer army of

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Joshua Trujillo/Hearst Newspapers

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► **Coming Sunday:** Columnist and Newtown resident Brian Koonz shares his thoughts on how the town has been changed forever.



Autumn Driscoll/Staff photographer

Above, Joe Saleem, center, is joined by others in a moment of silence led by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman and First Selectman Patricia Llodra in front of Edmond Town Hall in Newtown. The moment of silence and bell tolling was held across the state on Friday, the one-week anniversary of the Sandy Hook shootings. Left, Lynn and Chris McDonnell carry pink and purple balloons following a memorial Mass for their daughter, Grace McDonnell.

STATE DATA SHOW:

Gun sales skyrocket in wake of massacre

By MariAn Gail Brown

Gun sales spiked in Connecticut this week — just days after Adam Lanza opened fire on Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown — far surpassing the sale of handguns, rifles and shotguns during the same period last year.

Statistics from the state Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection reveal that retailers sold 1,220 guns in a single day Thursday, compared to 431 on the same day a year ago, records obtained by Hearst Connecticut Newspapers show.

Demand for guns in the aftermath of the massacre rose every day this week — except for Sunday, when many gun shops are closed. Ammunition sales also were robust, according to a survey of gun shop owners.

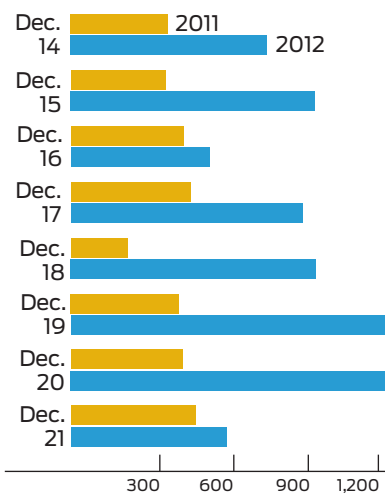
December is typically a strong month for firearm sales in Connecticut, said Lt. J. Paul Vance, spokesman for the State Police, who noted that the latest numbers were still unusual.

"At this time of the year, we tend to see an increase in people purchasing guns for themselves as

See Gun on A4

Gun sales surge

Sales of firearms in Connecticut surged in the days after the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre Dec. 14 that resulted in 28 deaths:



SOURCE: STATE DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES & PUBLIC PROTECTION

REACTION TO NRA

School officials split on call for armed guards

By Linda Conner Lambeck

The National Rifle Association's call Friday for an armed guard in every school appalls George Coleman as both a former state commissioner of education and as a grandfather whose three grandsons escaped the carnage that left 20 classmates and six teachers dead at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

"I anticipated a more reflective response from the organization given what the country is going through," said Coleman, a longtime resident of the Sandy Hook section of Newtown. "Frankly, I think their response is very irresponsible and self-serving."

The much anticipated NRA position came from Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president of the nation's leading gun-rights advocacy group with more than 4 million members. It has steadfastly opposed stricter regulation of firearms.

Better to crack down on violent video games — like one called "Kindergarten Killers" — and a media that act as silent enablers, if not complicit co-conspirators, than demonizing lawful gun owners, said LaPierre. He said that making schools "gun-free" zones is an open invitation to "every insane killer in America that schools are their safest place

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WEATHER

Partly cloudy.
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TRAGEDY IN NEWTOWN

GRACE A. MCDONNELL, 7

Seashells symbolize child’s love of the beach

By Susan Tuz

NEWTOWN — A dark blue urn bearing the name “Gracie” in gold script sat Friday in the nave of St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church.

It held the ashes of 7-year-old Grace Audrey McDonnell, one of 20 first-graders killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School a week earlier. White seashells arrayed beside the urn reflected the girl’s love of the beach.

Grace’s friends and family fought pounding wind and rain to reach the church, which filled slowly. The mourners’ mood was respectful and reserved. They had come to celebrate a life that had been cut short.

The service program bore images of wind swept beaches, rolling surf



and the young girl with a bucket in hand and a smile in her eyes.

Lynn McDonnell, wearing a black dress, offered a eulogy for her daughter.

“You are not only my daughter, you are my best friend, my soulmate, my teacher of life, love and peace,” McDonnell read from the last entry she had made in her daughter’s journal.

Her husband, Christopher McDonnell, added this in closing: “The presence of seashells brings the message that every passing life brings something beautiful to the world.”

Then the McDonnell family watched a balloon launch from the lawn of the church, before driving away with Grace’s ashes.

OLIVIA R. ENGEL, 6

Girl brought joy with her infectious giggle

By Susan Tuz

NEWTOWN — A large color photograph of Olivia Rose Engel, 6, adorned an easel with a cluster of white roses arranged on the floor.

Dressed in white, Olivia smiled playfully, bent slightly at the waist as if inviting those gathered to join in her fun.

Yet the mood was solemn at St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church Friday as hundreds gathered to say goodbye to the little girl, one of the students who died in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting a week earlier.

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, First Selectman Pat Llodra and Superintendent of Schools Janet Robinson were among those attending.

A lone state trooper stood at attention



beside the closed, white coffin in the sanctuary as Monsignor Robert Weiss returned to Olivia’s last moments. He recalled that a Newtown police officer bent down to the dying girl, held her in his arms and said “I love you.”

Olivia’s godparents, Dan Merton and Julie Pokrinchak, remembered the girl who loved purple and brought so much joy to the world.

They spoke of her “infectious giggle,” of how she laughed the loudest at her own jokes and how she loved to sail over the waves in a boat with her father, Brian, and grandfather, Richard Engel.

Olivia was to be an angel in St. Rose of Lima’s Christmas Eve pageant this year. As her mourners exited the chapel Friday, they learned that the pageant, to be held at Newtown High School, will be dedicated to her.



Autumn Driscoll/Staff photographer

Mourners arrive for a Memorial Mass for Grace McDonnell, a student killed in the Newtown shootings, at St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church in Newtown on Friday.

RACHEL D’AVINO

Teacher dedicated her life to helping children

By Kristen V. Brown

BETHLEHEM — Rachel D’Avino dedicated her life to helping children, her younger sister told a crowd at her funeral Friday at the Church of the Nativity here.

She was also the sort of older sister you looked up to, Sarah D’Avino said between sniffles. She was a selfless and determined young woman who excelled at everything and always gave her all.

D’Avino, 29, was killed during last week’s rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown. A behavioral therapist who had just begun work at Sandy Hook less than a week earlier, D’Avino died while protecting children from the carnage.

Mourners packed the small, rustic Catholic church and a big-screen television was set up in another room to stream the hour-long Mass for those who did not fit inside the worship hall.

The somber mood was echoed by a constant rain



battering the church’s great skylight overhead.

The slain woman’s godmother read a passage from Jeremiah: “A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.”

D’Avino was recalled as a woman on the rise. She was pursuing her doctorate at the University of St. Joseph in West Hartford, with a goal of specializing in helping autistic children. Her boyfriend, Anthony Cerritelli, was planning to propose on Christmas Eve.

But her sister stressed how much D’Avino had already done in her abbreviated life.

“She had already accomplished so much,” Sarah D’Avino said.

As the service ended, the choir sang “Amazing Grace.” Then, suddenly, the sun broke through the clouds outside, bathing the mourners in light as they left the church.

Said one, “That’s Rachel.”



Bob Luckey/Staff photographer



Cody Duty/Staff photographer

Above, pallbearers carry the casket of Sandy Hook Elementary School student Olivia Rose Engel into St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church in Newtown for her funeral Mass on Friday. At left, firefighters salute the funeral procession for Rachel D’Avino as it arrives at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on Friday. D’Avino was a member of the staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School and was killed in the shootings at the school last week.

TRAGEDY IN NEWTOWN

MARY J. SHERLACH, 56



Ned Gerard/Staff photographer

The ashes of Mary J. Sherlach are carried from St. Stephen Roman Catholic Church, in Trumbull following a funeral Mass on Friday. Sherlach was a school psychologist at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown and died in the mass shooting there last Friday.

Sherlach remembered as a spunky Miami Dolphins fan

By Keila Torres Ocasio

TRUMBULL — The morning rain ebbed as a procession of vehicles arrived for Friday's memorial Mass for Mary J. Sherlach, the school psychologist killed during the Newtown massacre a week earlier. Minutes later, the clouds gave way fully to sunshine as Sherlach, 56, was remembered as a spunky Miami Dolphins fan who loved her job and spent her life in service of others.



Mourners stepped from parked cars and into the embrace of one another. The first to enter the open double doors at St. Stephen Roman Catholic Church were three men in uniforms, two carrying bouquets of white roses and the third an urn containing the victim's remains. Sherlach was killed at Sandy Hook Elementary

School when she ran toward the shooter in an attempt to stop him. But observers inside the church said Friday's service was focused on the way Sherlach lived her life and not on the way it ended. Two of her friends recalled a compassionate woman who gave her time to anyone who asked for it. Another eulogized her with funny stories and took off his jacket to don a teal Miami Dolphins football

jersey. He said Sherlach was a fan of the team's famed former quarterback Dan Marino, and she and her husband, Bill, would go to games often. Should the crowd's enthusiasm wane, he told mourners, Sherlach would always rally them. The NFL team sent a teal and orange floral arrangement, which was placed on the altar near a Dolphins jersey left by someone else. To the left of the altar, another stand paid tribute

to another of Sherlach's passions with a gray Sandy Hook Elementary School T-shirt. Sherlach may have loved Dan Marino, but she lived for her job. One eulogist said she was often busy with school activities, so it was a source of consolation for her husband that they had spent a little more time together than usual last Friday morning. Sherlach had plans to retire next year. "It was a beautiful ser-

vice," said former U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays. "You felt that God was in that room." Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and Trumbull First Selectman Tim Herbst were also in attendance. Shays didn't know Sherlach, but his wife, Betsy, said the couple wanted to pay their respects to the shooting victims. "We just came out of quiet love and respect," she said. "I would like to think great good is going to come out these unimaginable events."

DYLAN HOCKLEY, 6

Hockley remembered for enthusiasm

By Ana Ley

BETHEL — Nicole Hockley takes comfort in believing her 6-year-old son is still being cared for by Anne Marie Murphy, the special education teacher who was fatally shot trying to protect the boy during last week's massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School. "Knowing that has eased our pain," she said Friday afternoon at a memorial service for Dylan Hockley inside the packed Walnut Hill Community Church. "Dylan is not alone." England-born Dylan, friends and family said, was an autistic boy with bright blue eyes who flapped his arms when he became excited, a tendency common in children with the developmental disorder. Dylan once told his mother he did it because he was a "beautiful butterfly." After his slaying, Dylan's mother and father isolated themselves from the flurry of media coverage but emerged from their "cocoon" to realize there had been an outpouring of support from people around the world, "proof of the inherently benevolent, good nature of people," Nicole Hockley said. "We (started) to understand and appreciate how what happened last week is starting to change the world," she said. "I don't know what that change will be. But I think it is very fitting that this new change, this new beginning, is from a peaceful, quiet place aptly named Newtown." She recalled how Dylan's big brother, Jake, asked his family over breakfast on Thursday why the world was fixated on the deaths of Dylan and 19 classmates. "A relative of mine provided the answer: 'The world is talking because of the children. Even in horror movies and violent video games, it is unacceptable to kill children. People might want to be scared or thrilled, but they do not want to lose faith in humanity.' 'I have not lost my faith in humanity.'"



Carol Kaliff/Staff photographer

Nicole and Ian Hockley stand with their son, Jake, as they wait to release 26 balloons in memory of the victims of the Sandy Hook School shooting. A funeral service for their son, and Jake's brother, Dylan Hockley, one of the victims, was held at Walnut Hill Community Church in Bethel Friday.

FUNDRAISER

Reporter organizes concert for victims

By Tom Cleary

NEWTOWN — As John Voket drove home from work last Saturday, tired from a 20-hour workday at the local newspaper here and teary-eyed with the shooting that tore apart his town still fresh in his mind, he had an idea. Voket, who for the majority of his career has reported on the music industry, could use his contacts and friends to put together a benefit concert that could help those victimized by Adam Lanza, who killed 26 people, including 20 children, at Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14. He said he wants to do whatever he can to help raise more money for the suffering community and "to create something going forward in their memory." Voket reached out to a friend, concert promoter Keith Mahler, of Waterbury-based Premier Concerts, to organize the event. Mahler and his colleagues have put out a call to artists, asking them to come and support the devastated people of Newtown. The Webster Bank

Arena in Bridgeport could be a possible venue for the benefit. Arena spokesman Michael Foley said while nothing has been pinned down and the concert planning is in a preliminary stage, "we are ready to host a show if it comes together." Voket said there could be a series of concerts going forward, allowing artists not available for the first show, which could be in January or February, to participate. Money raised through the concert will go to the official Newtown charity fund that has been set up by Newtown Savings Bank. Through corporate and private underwriting, 100 percent of the proceeds will go to help the families of the victims, first responders and others directly impact by the massacre, Mahler said. Musicians interested in participating can contact Keith Mahler or Anthony Rhodes at 203-573-1600 or through email, keith@premierconcerts.com or anthony@premierconcerts.com.
 tcleary@ctpost.com; 203-540-9827; <http://twitter.com/tomwcleary>

TWO MORE TO BE LAID TO REST

The funerals for victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings continue. Emilie Parker's funeral is scheduled for Saturday in Ogden, Utah, where her family lived before they moved to Newtown earlier this year, according to the Standard-Examiner. A Homegoing Celebration for Ana Grace Marquez-Greene will be held Saturday. Calling hours are from 10 a.m. to noon, with a service at noon at The First Cathedral at 1151 Blue Hills Ave., Bloomfield. Burial is private.

TRAGEDY IN NEWTOWN



New York Times

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of the group Code Pink, is removed from the room by security after interrupting a speech by Wayne LaPierre, the executive vice president of the National Rifle Association, in Washington on Friday. During the news conference, the NRA called for armed protection for each school in the country as the best way to protect children from gun violence.

Gun sales soar in state

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Christmas gifts," Vance said Friday. "But these numbers are a very big increase. Could it be as a result of this tragedy? It's possible."

On Dec. 14, the day Lanza stormed Sandy Hook, 756 guns were sold in Connecticut, compared to 375 sold in the state on the same day in 2011, according to records released in response to a Freedom of Information Act request from Hearst.

A day later, retailers made 941 sales. Only 365 guns were sold on that day in 2011.

In Connecticut, the figures released are for overall guns sales, Vance said, adding that the state Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection did not have the numbers broken down by type of firearm — handgun, semi-automatics or long guns.

The FBI, which compiles national figures on background checks on prospective gun buyers, will not release state-by-state statistics until January. Those numbers will provide law enforcement agencies and public policymakers with a snapshot of how the Sandy Hook massacre affected the national outlook on guns.

The gun sales boom in Connecticut mirrors what other states have experienced after mass shootings.

Colorado saw a 40 percent surge after a gunman in an Aurora movie theater killed a dozen patrons and

wounded 58 more with a semi-automatic rifle, shot-gun and handgun. In Arizona, FBI data show one-day handgun sales rose 60 percent after a gunman killed six people in Tucson in 2011.

The same scenario played out after the Columbine, High School shootings in Littleton, Colo., in 1999, when gun owners rushed to beat what they thought would be massive restrictions on assault guns.

Fear and a desire to protect oneself are natural reactions to a mass shooting, but Gary Kleck, a Florida State University professor who studies gun control, deterrence and violence, believes the spike in gun sales is only a "temporary blip."

"After shootings like this, it's a common reaction that people purchase guns," said Kleck, the author of "Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America." "Most of the time," Kleck said, "it's people who were already looking to buy anyway, or it's people who already own guns anticipating the possibility that their preferred model of gun might be banned, especially if it's an assault weapon because what those are is so vaguely defined."

Since Sandy Hook, states as far flung as Florida, Pennsylvania and Alaska have seen gun sales rise sharply.

In Illinois, from the day of the Sandy Hook shooting, through Tuesday, that state's Firearms Transfer

Inquiry Program processed 12,557 background checks — double what it processed over the same period last year, the Associated Press reports.

Calls for more gun control have erupted since the Newtown massacre, with President Barack Obama backing renewed gun restrictions in response to the school shooting. At the same time, semi-automatic rifles are selling out at many Walmart locations.

"What we've witnessed is an immense tragedy," a salesman at the Connecticut Gun Exchange in Monroe said, adding that he's noticed more women wanting guns. "People may be concerned about their safety, or if they already have guns, they may be concerned about changes in gun laws."

Adam Lanza's mother, Nancy Lanza, had legally purchased the Bushmaster semi-automatic rifle and Glock handgun her son used in the rampage that took the lives of 26 at Sandy Hook. Before driving to the school, he shot his mother in the head four times as she lay in bed.

As sales rocketed, gun buyers have found themselves waiting longer than usual, sometimes for hours, or having to leave stores without their guns because the FBI background check system was overwhelmed and kept crashing.

twitter.com/MariAnGail-Brown; 203-330-6288; mg-brown@ctpost.com.

Educators divided on arming schools

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to inflict maximum mayhem with minimum risk."

"The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," said La Pierre. "What if, when Adam Lanza started shooting his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday, he had been confronted by qualified, armed security?"

La Pierre said there are millions of active and retired police and military who could be deployed to protect students. He called on Congress to fund the citizens' militia and outlined a "National School Shield Program ... for every school that wants it."

The effort, to be directed by former U.S. Rep. Asa Hutchinson, R-Ark, is aimed at helping schools protect against further violence with an army of trained and armed volunteers.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., meanwhile, has pledged to reintroduce an updated assault weapons ban similar to the one she sponsored in 1994, which expired in 2004. And President Barack Obama on Wednesday tapped Vice President Joe Biden to lead a task force that will make policy recommendations by the end of January.

There had been speculation that with public opinion moving in the direction of more gun control, the NRA would give ground by supporting limits on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, as well as expanding background checks of gun purchasers.

The NRA has now "made itself completely irrelevant to the national conversation about preventing gun violence, by saying that the answer to the tragedy in Newtown is to put more deadly semi-automatic assault weapons on the streets and into our schools," said U.S. Sen. elect Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who represents Newtown in his waning days in the House.

Local educators, parents and others were split in their reaction to the NRA position.

Coleman, who lives three minutes away from Sandy Hook School, said he would have hoped the NRA would have spelled out more concrete, effective and assertive steps to protecting schools and the public from assault rifles — or better yet concede they should be banned.

His wife, Carrie, was among those who spent an agonizing 45 minutes in a nearby firehouse waiting to learn the fate of their grandchildren — a kindergartner, a second-grader and a third-grader — and were relieved to find them unharmed. All three of his grandchildren lost friends in the shooting. But they didn't find out the identities of their friends, Coleman said, until they listened to the president speak their names Sunday night.

"I don't want my grandchildren to interact in a place where there are guns, or ask what those guns do," Coleman said.

But Ridgefield Board of Education member Austin Drukker said having a police officer in the schools could help students and parents feel more comfortable around law enforcement personnel. He said having an armed police officer at all schools might be good idea.

"There is no single answer," he said. "But this sounds like a very interesting solution. I assume any costs associated with that would have to be absorbed by the school budget."

Tammy Boyle, who has a son at Columbus School in Bridgeport, also likes the idea.

"It would be safer if the security guards were armed, as long as they are trained," said Boyle. She said she wants her son protected, period.

In Bridgeport, all schools have security guards, but only city police and school resource officers stationed in and around the high schools carry weapons.

"If I had my way, there would be a Bridgeport police officer in every school," said Schools Superintendent Paul Vallas, adding that police act as deterrents. But Vallas said the NRA position falls short of getting at the root of the problem, which he said has to include a ban on assault rifles.

In Stamford, where there are armed School Resource Officers in the high schools, Stamford Schools Superintendent Winifred Hamilton, isn't convinced that putting an armed guard in every school will prevent heinous individuals from causing harm.

"What I am sure of is that we need to be diligent each and every day in protecting our students and staff," she said. "I believe we can do that with increased security presence, effective security technology and ongoing training."

Danbury Superintendent Sal Pascarella said having armed officers is not a new concept in his district, either. School resource officers in the city's high school and two middle schools already carry weapons.

"Everything is on the table when it comes to protecting students," Pascarella said. In the weeks and months ahead, he said improving security measures would be at the top of everyone's agenda, along with improvements to the mental health system.

Nationwide, there are nearly 99,000 public schools. Some suggest placing armed guards in all schools is unrealistic.

The NRA "thinking shows no regard for the anticipated drastic federal cuts public education is about to experience after Jan. 2," said Jacqueline Kelleher, chairwoman of the Bridgeport Board of Education and mother of two sons at Bassick High School.

Chris Kinsley, a teacher at Blackham School in Bridgeport whose colleague, Krista Rekos, lost a daughter in the Newtown shooting, said the NRA logic makes no sense.

"Fort Hood had plenty of guns there and it didn't prevent a nut from killing innocent people," said Kinsley. He called the NRA a bunch of chest-beating Neanderthals who need to employ some common sense.

"Any hunter who hunts with either a semi- or fully automatic weapon isn't a real sportsman," Kinsley said. "They're just lousy shots."

Some worry guns in schools will invite more tragedies, not fewer.

Shaun Mitchell, a Bridgeport Central High School teacher, said he feels very safe at his school, where officers patrol, but questions the need for them to be armed.

"Who's to say that gun on the armed officer won't find its way into a student's hands?" he asked. "If they want it, they'll get it. I'd rather (have) no guns."

Others say it defies logic to think an armed guard is sufficient defense against a crazy person with an assault rifle.

"So what are you going to do, give the guards assault rifles?" asked Gwen Samuel, president of the Connecticut Parents Union, a Meriden-based parent advocacy organization. She called the NRA totally out of touch with reality.

The answer to mass shootings cannot be more guns, said Kristen Record, a physics teacher at Bunnell High School in Stratford.

"Armed security guards could not have prevented the shooting in Newtown, or any other mass shooting incident that has occurred," Record said. "Our attention needs to be focused on prevention, not reaction. We need to focus on how we, as a community, can get help for individuals with mental health issues."

Staff writer Dirk Perrefort and Dan Freedman of Hearst Newspapers contributed to this report.

NRA fights back as bells toll for Sandy Hook victims

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retired police officers and trained firearms users.

"The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," LaPierre claimed.

Rather than supporting limits on assault weapons and high capacity magazines, and expanding background checks on purchasers, LaPierre took aim at the media, Hollywood and video game producers.

"There exists in this country, sadly, a callous, corrupt and corrupting industry that sells and sows violence against its own people, through vicious, violent video games with names like 'Bulletstorm,' 'Grand Theft Auto,' 'Mortal Kombat' and 'Splatterhouse,'" LaPierre charged.

To bolster his claims, he showed a portion of "Kindergarten Killers," a game available free on the Internet in which a janitor shoots young children.

"It's been online for 10 years. How come my research staff can't find it, and all of yours couldn't or didn't want anyone to know you had found it?" he asked. "Isn't fantasizing about killing people as a way to get your kicks really the filthiest form of pornography?"

Investigators know that Lanza

was infatuated with shooting games, as well as shooting guns.

During the Dec. 14 search of the Yogananda Street home Lanza shared with his mother, Nancy, 52, investigators seized a trove of video game material as well as computer equipment, cellphones and other electronics.

People who knew the family said he spent hours in the basement with its elaborate video game set-up that included computers and a large screen television.

Daniel Frost, who sat near Lanza in a Newtown High School computer class, remembered the killer enjoyed a game called "Counter Strike," in which players compete against each other as terrorists and counter-terrorists.

Frost even recalled the weapons Lanza chose: an M-4 military-style assault rifle and a Glock.

Lanza used a .223 Bushmaster assault rifle, patterned after the military's M-16, to mow down the 26 Sandy Hook school victims. He carried a Glock and Sig Sauer handguns, favorites of police, which he used to kill his mother and himself.

LaPierre's remarks were criticized by anti-gun proponents, including Burke Strunsky, a

"We should make sure the bells never leave our head. We need to hear them when we wake up, for as long as it takes ... that we do what we have to do to live up to the beautiful memories of these people who died."

U.S. Sen.-elect Chris Murphy

California senior deputy district attorney; Michael Bloomberg, New York City's mayor, and Brian Malte, an official with the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

"The NRA is completely out of step with the national conversation, particularly when it comes to semi-automatic rifles and high capacity clips that have no legitimate hunting or self-defense purpose," said Strunsky, a two-time prosecutor of the year. "The NRA is positioned to become irrelevant unless they take a temperature reading of national sentiments and acknowledge the patent realities of the number of guns and

gun violence."

Bloomberg, who leads Mayors Against Illegal Guns, called the NRA news conference "a shameful evasion of the crisis affecting our country."

"Instead of offering solutions to a problem they helped create," he said, "they offered a paranoid, dystopian vision of a more dangerous and violent America where everyone is armed and no place is safe."

"The NRA is tone deaf," Malte said. "The real conversation that the American public wants to have is about comprehensive solutions to the 32 gun murders that occur every day in the country."

LaPierre responded that armed guards is the appropriate solution.

"A gun in the hands of a Secret Service agent protecting the president isn't a bad word; a gun in the hands of a soldier protecting the United States isn't a bad word. So why is the idea of a gun ... bad when it's used to protect our children in their schools?" he countered.

As the bells tolled in Newtown on Friday morning, firefighters inside the Sandy Hook station wrapped their arms around each other and wept.

A week ago, they were witnesses to 500 joyful reunions and 26 horrifying discoveries. Their firehouse, just down the street from the school, served as the reuniting point for parents and children.

"It's been really hard," said George Lockwood Jr., an engineer with the department. "But we are all sticking together."

Meanwhile the vigils continue. At the former Fairfield Hills campus in Newtown on Friday night, hundreds gathered in the cold, consoling each other, sobbing together upon hearing the 26 victims' names again and listening to words of hope from First Selectman Patricia Llodra and School Superintendent Janet Robinson.

What they didn't hear was the answer they sought: Why?

And the church bells will keep tolling. Saturday they will ring during services for three more children: Ana Grace Marquez-Greene at 10 a.m. at the First Cathedral in Bloomfield; Josephine Grace Gray at 11 a.m. in St. Rose of Lima Catholic in Newtown and Emilie Alice Parker in Utah.

Staff writers Kristen Brown, Eileen FitzGerald, Dan Feedman, Dirk Perrefort and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

TRAGEDY IN NEWTOWN



Autumn Driscoll/Staff photographer

Sam Hallaway, of Danbury, bends down so a boy can say hello to his cat, Phantom Queen, Friday in front of a memorial for the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown.



Norm Cummings/Staff photographer

Five New Milford mothers and their children followed Friday morning's moment of silence and bell ringing dedicated to those who died last week in Newtown by walking slowly through the rain and blustery wind around the Village Green in New Milford, each carrying a poster bearing the name of one of those who died. Among the participants are, front left, Paige Tannone, Hannah Ciampini, behind Paige, and Landon Tannone. Among the moms are, from left, Aimee Ciampini, Kayla Tannone, Mary Kate Tannone and Rebecca Chepren. Also lending their efforts to the demonstration are Starr Gustas, Skylar Gustas, Luke Gustas, Jessica Stellato, Kyleigh Stelatto, Braydon Stellato and Lauren Tannone. Paige and Landon Tannone are carrying posters honoring Sandy Hook Elementary School Principal Dawn Hochsprung and teacher Lauren Rousseau.



Autumn Driscoll/Staff photographer

A memorial Mass for Grace McDonnell, a student victim of the Newtown shootings, was held Friday at St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church in Newtown.



Ben Brewer/Associated Press

Mourners release lanterns during the community memorial vigil at Ben Lomond High School in Ogden, Utah for Emilie Parker, one of the children murdered in the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, Thursday.



Portions of a memorial site are covered to protect them from the rain Friday, in Newtown honoring the individuals who were killed during a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday. The school was evacuated after Adam Lanza opened fire killing 26 individuals, 20 whom were children.

Cody Duty/Hearst Newspapers/Staff photographer